

UNIT 83 – UPSC - Shivaji Maharaj

India's History : Medieval India : Shivaji captures Torna - 1646

Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj (1627-1680)

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Forts

Timeline of Shivaji Maharaj



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Shivaji was born of a Maratha family in 1627 A.D. His father was a chief of the kingdom of Bijapur. Though he was high up, he was not allowed to control any fort. In his early youth, Shivaji inspired the local peasant youths around Poona to follow him in his idealistic pursuits.



Maratha hill fort of Purandar

In his early, his band attacked the mountain fort of Torna about twenty miles from Poona. He took control from the fort as Governor. It was characteristic of him immediately send a word to the King of Bijapur, that he had done purely in the king's interest as the ex-governor was not given all the revenue due to the king. This brought more time, and Shivaji used this technique of cunningness to conquer more and more such forts. The king eventually ordered Shivaji to stop these activities. But Shivaji knew that by now the whole region was behind him and thus ignored any warnings from the King of Bijapur.

The King then sent a small army under Afzal Khan to catch him dead or alive. Shivaji now portrayed even more cunning techniques. He pretended to be extremely afraid of Afzal Khan and his army, and offered to surrender personally to him provided his well-being was guaranteed. He suggested that he should be accompanied by two unarmed followers to meet Afzal Khan and two of his guards personally. This was agreed to. When the meeting took place, Afzal Khan (a big, stocky and giant of a figure, compared to short and agile figure of Shivaji) tried to kill Shivaji with a big embrace and stab at Shivaji. Shivaji was however prepared with a short knife under his palm. With a swift action, he slayed the giant.

When the ruler in Delhi heard of this he sent his general Shaista Khan to suppress this uprising which was gaining momentum at great speed. Shivaji had to abandon temporarily the plains to a much more powerful Moghul army. With the help of the locals, he could enter into the living quarters of the general with his followers and created chaos. He had caused irreversible injury to the general's body and pride, so much so that he was recalled to Delhi.

Due to requirement of maintaining a large army, Shivaji felt the need of finance. His next crusade was to loot the Mughal city of Surat, which was the centre of the rich, traders from all over. He is likened here to Robin Hood here. No injury to women, children of elderly was ever caused. This wealth gave Shivaji sufficient wherewithal to continue his crusade.

This time the Mughal emperor sent a vast army under its senior general, Jai Singh. After a few skirmishes Shivaji thought it prudent nominally to accept the emperor's sovereignty and offered to come to court itself to pay homage. The trick worked and his army remained intact. He proceeded to Agra to present himself at the mughal court. However the perfidious emperor arrested him. As is well known, Shivaji tricked his jailors and escaped. By the time he returned to Poona, his army was in good condition. This was his opportunity to give a crushing defeat to the retreating armies.



Shivaji drew strength from the guidance of his guru, Guru Ramdas who together with mata Jijabai in his young life, made him a national hero.



Now Shivaji had an unquestioned sway over a big area. Fort Raigad was to become the centre of power and prowess. During the coronation ceremony he gave magnificent gifts to holy men and the poor. He died after three years. His son could not amass sufficient strength to finish the work of liberation throughout Bharat. Nevertheless, Shivaji had laid the foundation of a great Hindu empire which lasted for two centuries.

